



# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
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PATRICIA CURRY  
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SANDRA RUDNICK  
STACEY SAVELLE, VICE CHAIR  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON, VICE CHAIR

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **May 5, 2008**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Patricia Curry  
Ann Franzen  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Tina Pedersen  
Martha Trevino Powell  
Stacey Savelle  
Adelina Sorkin  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Susan F. Friedman  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Sandra Rudnick

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the May 5, 2008, meeting was unanimously approved.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the April 21, 2008, meeting were unanimously approved.

## CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Sorkin announced that questions from previous meetings on Regional Centers and psychotropic medication will be addressed on May 19, when Department of Children and Family Services medical director Dr. Charles Sophy will present.
- On behalf of Los Angeles County, DCFS is seeking one of nine grants to be awarded by the U.S. Administration of Children, Youth, and Families to states and counties that commit to the diligent recruitment of families for children in the foster care system. The grant will be \$400,000 a year for five years, with a nine-month 'phase one' period to allow for developing specific objectives and a plan to achieve them. DCFS has requested the Commission's formal support of its application for Project Commit, as it is known, which is due on May 30. **Commissioner Williams moved to approve the draft letter of support, with an amendment that, if the grant is awarded, the Commission will assign a Commissioner and an alternate (to be named later) to the task force for the planning phase of the project. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**
- **Commissioner Kleinberg moved to give the Children's Law Center permission to use the Commission's name and/or logo on Foster Care Awareness Month materials in 2008, as it has in past years. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.** (Although the logo is not often used, one was developed for a Commission brochure some years ago.)
- The Commission office has not been fully staffed in over a year, but executive director Kim Foster reported that interviews for candidates to permanently fill the secretarial position have recently taken place and an individual has been selected. Once the appropriate paperwork goes through the Executive Office, that person's release date will be negotiated with the Department of Mental Health, where she works now, and it is hoped that she will be on board by May 30.

Staff have also been working with DCFS and the Department of Human Resources to place a former foster youth at the Commission office through the countywide Career Development Intern program, which offers entry-level positions to former foster youth that can expose them to career opportunities and act as a starting point for moving up within the county structure. The item and funding have been arranged through the DCFS budget, and a full-time paid intern should be in the Commission office by May 30. Vice Chair Savelle has committed to offering the coaching services required by the program, which also provides ongoing training (Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton will participate there as well), a strong communication and feedback component, and further enrichment activities with the larger group of interns. After a year of gaining skills, interns are encouraged to apply for other positions.

The program grew out of the county's experience with former foster youth being at a disadvantage in taking the examination to enter county service, and Commissioners suggested that some of the program's 'success stories'—young people who have gone

on to higher education and better jobs—be recruited as role models for those entering now. Ms. Foster said the five young people interviewed for the Commission position were motivated and energetic, and all were prepared to talk about their strengths and what they wanted to gain from the experience.

The intern selected will provide general office support and attend Commission meetings and other events to learn how the Commission's work fits into county government as a whole. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton believes that day-to-day exposure to the issues will be more valuable for the young person than simply attending meetings as a youth appointee to the Commission, and that the intern can also help educate Commissioners on matters important to those in the child welfare system.

- The Commission's annual report is being prepared, and committee chairs and those representing the Commission on other bodies will be asked to provide information on their groups' mission, goals, and accomplishments during the past year.
- Responses for the luncheon portion of the leadership conference scheduled for May 21 were tallied, and Ms. Foster will respond on Commissioners' behalf.

#### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

DCFS director Trish Ploehn updated Commissioners on several items.

- Ms. Ploehn distributed the organizational chart requested by Commissioners, noting that it drills down to the middle management level and is broken out by bureaus. DCFS has 7,299 employees today, a number that will rise to 7,313 on July 1.

The department's executive team includes everyone on the first page of the organizational chart plus Ms. Ploehn's executive assistant, Norma Dreger. That group considers strategic and policy issues, and meets every Wednesday afternoon. The executive operations committee, which deals with day-to-day operational issues, meets on Thursday mornings, is overseen by chief deputy director Ted Myers, and includes the same individuals with the exception of Ms. Ploehn herself. Visitation, which Commissioner Kleinberg inquired about, would be implemented via the operations committee, with funding and staffing resources vetted through the executive team.

Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton suggested that Commissioners make future information requests directly to Ms. Ploehn so that she may decide who can best provide answers.

In response to a question from Commissioner Pedersen, Ms. Ploehn explained that a Regional Center liaison exists in each regional office, usually at the Children's Services Administrator I level, with some at the supervisor level. (CSA I personnel are low-level managers, many of whom have been redeployed into the field.)

- At an inquiry from Commissioner Kleinberg, Ms. Ploehn said that refinements to the memorandum of understanding with the Department of Health Services with regard to combining drug and alcohol contracts are being negotiated. Point of engagement

contracts have drug and alcohol prevention components, for instance, but court-ordered drug testing without available treatment accomplishes little. Commissioner Kleinberg urged a comprehensive look at where drug prevention monies exist, especially considering the vast numbers of children who are being exposed to alcohol and drugs through their parents, and who are themselves abusing substances. Chair Sorkin would like to see this as a Commission agenda item for the future.

- The recent solicitation process for foster family agency and group home contracts yielded 161 responses, the majority from agencies seeking to renew their contracts and a handful from new agencies. Of current contractors, 32 group homes and seven foster family agencies did not submit the required paperwork. About half of those indicated that they chose not to reapply because they are seeking other contracts or are leaving the business. About 20 agencies, however, wish to serve but did not get the paperwork in on time; their contracts will expire on October 31. The department is working to resolve this issue in the best interest of the children placed through these agencies, and Lisa Parrish will provide further information later in this meeting.
- On April 22, Chief Executive Officer Bill Fujioka presented to the Board of Supervisors a proposed county budget of \$21.9 billion, down by \$600,000 and 35 items from last year's budget. DCFS took a 2.61 percent reduction, all from internal cuts. The department plans to reinvest some curtailments in the current budget by purchasing 14 items—two in human resources, five in procurement, one in accounting, and six to augment the risk management section that oversees child fatalities and critical incidents. Budget hearings begin Wednesday, and the five Board offices have indicated their support for that plan.

The current budget deals with county cuts only, as the state's budget mandates are not expected until September or possibly October. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the state Child Welfare Directors Association, and other advocates are fighting state cuts to child welfare services, arguing the future negative impact on prison and substance-abuse services, but reductions are anticipated to be anywhere from 3 to 11.4 percent (\$5 million to \$25.6 million).

- At tomorrow's Board meeting, a motion will be introduced to establish a Children's Services Investigative Unit, a revamping of the Office of Independent Review concept, active some years ago, that would provide high-level intervention and oversight review for child fatalities and critical incidents. The unit would consist of an attorney and two investigators as well as clerical support, and would report to the Chief Executive Officer. Its purpose would be to look not only at DCFS actions, but at those of other departments and private agencies that touched the affected child or family. Ms. Ploehn feels that the unit will be a good "sister act" to the department's augmented risk management section, to loop back what is learned during these investigations. The new unit would begin with investigating cases in which the child was known to DCFS, but any Board office, the Chief Executive Office, or Ms. Ploehn herself could refer other child deaths to unit personnel.

- At last week's stakeholder planning meeting for the prevention and early intervention component of the Mental Health Services Act, the amount of funds dedicated to children and transition-age youth and their families was raised from 51 percent to 65 percent—rather than the 70 percent that was hoped for—following heated debate, an initial vote and recount, and a dramatic series of eleventh-hour compromise votes. Much opposition exists from adult activists to allocating these funds to children; many people either believe that children don't need them (having other funding streams to tap) or that they will not be spent efficiently. As Commissioners heard last month from Los Angeles Child Guidance director Betsy Pfromm, many mental health providers are not receiving enough referrals to fill existing programs. The onus lies on everyone to design programs and ensure referrals that take advantage of every dollar. Tracking and documenting outcomes, to prove that the money has been spent to make a difference in children's lives, is equally important. (A similar situation exists, Commissioner Biondi said, with slots that were allocated two years ago for workers in probation camps but that have only just now been filled. Where has the money been going?) Commissioner Curry will attend a systems leadership team this afternoon that provides oversight for the community services and supports component of the Mental Health Services Act, implemented now for two years.

#### **WRAPAROUND PRESENTATION**

Michael Rauso presented the DCFS multi-agency services division's 2007 annual report on wraparound, a program begun in Los Angeles County in 1998 as a way to better serve high-need children and youth in their homes and communities, 'wrapping' services around them and their families. It is an intensive, family-focused, child-centered process with a team that provides 'round-the-clock care, if necessary, with a whatever-it-takes approach to keeping the child in the community. As of April 25, the wraparound program's \$66 million serves 1,151 children through 34 contracted provider agencies. It is in the process of complying with a March 2007 order to increase slots to 1,217 by June 2008, and Mr. Rauso is confident that this goal will be met.

Nearly two-thirds of referrals to wraparound (64 percent) are made by DCFS, with 23 percent coming from Probation and 13 percent from the Department of Mental Health. As providers hone their skills, the length of stay in the program is decreasing, with graduation occurring in less than a year, on average, for the first time since the program began. Performance measures include permanency, safety, and well-being, and data indicates that targets for these measures are being achieved or surpassed, despite the fact that CAFAS scores (the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale) are the highest in the program's history, indicating a greater level of functional impairment in the children and families being served. The average participant age is 14.09 years, with 70 percent in the 11 to 15 age range, 20 percent 16 and older, and the remainder ages 6 to 10.

(Mr. Rauso noted a mistake in the report that will be corrected. The youth services survey in Appendix A inadvertently shows the same questions being posed—referring to "my child"—as in the youth services survey for families in Appendix B. In fact, the survey

language was different for the two instruments, with the youth survey asking similar questions about the youth's own experience.)

About 80 percent of wraparound youth are on some sort of psychotropic medication—obesity and other weight-related issues that sometimes stem from medication are addressed by providers as they appear—and graduation does not mean that a bipolar disorder, for example, is cured, nor that families do not continue to receive mental health services. Providers are charged with making sure that graduating families continue to get what they need, and transition plans also address how those services are paid for (often through EPSDT—Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment, a Federal program—or sliding-scale fees). Identifying the child's underlying need is key, Mr. Rauso said, and sometimes it can be addressed without resorting to typical services.

Although referring departments certainly serve developmentally delayed children, the wraparound program does not generally work with Regional Center clients, mostly because many of them are not themselves able to participate in the therapeutic process. Families can be 'wrapped,' however, and be referred to services. Mr. Rauso's section has analyzed information on families who drop out of wraparound and found that most have expectations that may not match the realities of the program, or that they do not want to be involved in such an intensive process.

Along with details about the overall wraparound program, the report also presents results from a small longitudinal study begun in 2004 to compare outcomes for a random selection of 52 wraparound graduates to those for 52 DCFS youth who were in an RCL 12 or above placement in 2004 and subsequently moved to a less restrictive placement. (Data on Probation youth was not available for this study.) Although both groups had a similar number of out-of-home placement moves before the study (264 for the RCL group and 256 for the wraparound group), youth who graduated from wraparound were 36 times less likely to move again. In the past two and a half years, the 977 placement days (a total of seven placements) for the wraparound graduates has cost just under \$56,000, while the 38,110 placement days (249 total placements) for the RCL group has cost almost \$3.5 million. Of the 52 individuals in the wraparound group, 49 are no longer involved in the system in any way. Clearly, evidence shows that the wraparound approach works.

Since the program's efficacy is not in question, Commissioner Biondi asked why wrap-around was not being expanded (particularly for Probation children) in place of multisystemic therapy, an approach that excludes gang members and whose assessments yield far worse outcomes. Lisa Parrish explained that the two programs were designed for very different populations. With wraparound, created to help children from RCL 12 or higher placements, a child and family team meets regularly and includes a facilitator, a parent partner, and other supporters. With multisystemic therapy—60 slots currently exist through the Department of Mental Health, some of which the Probation Department has bought through the Title IV-E waiver—a therapist goes to the child's home.

Commissioner Biondi asked about the START (Start Taking Action Responsibly Today) program, a multidisciplinary team of representatives from DCFS, Probation, the Depart-

ment of Mental Health, and education that some years ago became the case-carrying entity for youth exhibiting delinquency behavior, surrounding them with services. That program no longer exists, Mr. Rauso said, but has become the Interagency Delinquency Prevention Program (IDPP). Referrals have been an issue for the IDPP—a report on it is forthcoming—and Commissioner Biondi urged training for workers so that they know to send youth there who could benefit. Commissioner Curry voiced a desire to see the additional wraparound slots that are planned be designated for older youth and probation youth, so that providers can work on arranging mentors, legal guardianships, and adoptions for youth ages 14 to 18.

Wraparound providers work closely with schools, and Chair Sorkin asked that future reports track school-setting information—whether youth attend public, county, charter, or alternative schools, or other options—especially in light of the criticism that charter schools accept few special-needs students. Mr. Rauso promised that providers would capture that information for next year's wraparound report, though he cautioned that participants often change schools during a single year. Increases in school referrals to wraparound through the Department of Mental Health are being sought, since children can be eligible under AB 3632. Commissioner Powell emphasized the need for school principals to be aware of the programs and services that are available for their students.

Commissioner Kleinberg expressed frustration and concern that the learnings from successful programs such as wraparound are often not passed on and integrated elsewhere within DCFS and other departments. In Mr. Rauso's five years with DCFS, he has perceived a definite shift in how strength-based, family-focused approaches like team decision-making have permeated daily practice. Wraparound deals with higher levels of need in its participants all the time, with more substance abuse (by both parents and children), yet children are getting back into their communities sooner. Provider agencies may be successful, Commissioner Kleinberg acknowledged, but little evidence exists that DCFS social workers benefit from what is being learned in the program. She continues to hear, for example, of a lack of follow-up after team decision-making conferences. Practices that are in synch with the family-to-family approach have been broadening throughout DCFS for some time, Lisa Parrish explained, in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health. A strengths-based approach is a culture change for DCFS staff, and its training academy for new-hires continues to address that specifically.

Several Commissioners congratulated Mr. Rauso on a comprehensive report, and **Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton presented a four-part motion:**

- **That the possibility of separating information in the wraparound program's annual report by referring department (DCFS, Probation, and Mental Health) be investigated, and that subsequent annual reports provide data disaggregated by referring department**
- **That DCFS ask the Probation Department to review and analyze all information on its wraparound participants**

- **That DCFS ask the Probation Department to participate in and provide information for any future longitudinal studies of wraparound participants and outcomes**
- **That DCFS ask wraparound provider agencies for information on the differences in participants referred by different departments**

**Vice Chair Savelle seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

### **GROUP HOME AND FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACTS**

In the interests of time, Lisa Parrish's presentation on the redesign of residentially based services was put over until another Commission meeting. She was asked instead to discuss the issues concerning the group home and foster family agency contracts that were referred to earlier by Ms. Ploehn. Ms. Parrish asked Walter Chan from DCFS's contracts administration section to summarize the process to date.

In 2006, the California Department of Social Services authorized the use of a Request for Statement of Qualifications (RFSQ) for soliciting service providers, and Los Angeles County used this process four years ago for group home contracts. (A different process was used five years ago for foster family agency contracts.) Current group home and foster family agency contracts expire on October 31, 2008.

In April 2007, DCFS released a preliminary draft of the RFSQ and statement of qualifications for group home and foster family agency contracts set to begin on November 1, 2008. The department advertised these documents on the DCFS website and invited comments from providers, then released the formal RFSQ on August 31, 2007. To publicize that opportunity, it took out 19 ads in four major newspapers in Southern California—five in the *Los Angeles Times*, five in *Hoy*, four in the *Compton Bulletin*, and five in the *Chinese Daily News*—that were seen in September, October, and November of 2007. The ads instructed interested parties to visit the DCFS website or the county's Internal Services Department website for further information and documentation. In addition, DCFS mailed a notification about the new RFSQ to current contractors and other interested parties, advising them to visit those websites or come in person to a DCFS regional office, where they would be given a CD containing the RFSQ documents.

Vendors with Los Angeles County—which include all current group home and foster family agency providers—are required to register with the county's online WebVen system, maintained by the Internal Services Department. By selecting commodity codes in WebVen that relate to the various service sectors in which they are interested, they receive alerts (sent to the e-mail address associated with their county vendor number) about bidding opportunities. Between August 31, 2007, and the end of February 2008, when responses were due, new documents were posted on the DCFS and WebVen websites seven times (addenda, changes of conference dates, and so on). Automated alerts were e-mailed each time, and three additional postal mailings were also sent.



By February 29, 2008, at 6:00 p.m., 161 vendors had submitted timely paperwork, but about 20 current contractors who were intending to apply missed the deadline for a variety of reasons. Some were confused by different dates on different mailings, some e-mail alerts or mailed notifications may have been directed to staff members no longer at the agency, and at least one courier was caught in traffic.

DCFS is now reviewing the timely submissions for completeness and working on a 'gap analysis' regarding capacity and how to handle those children placed at agencies whose contracts expire at the end of October. The department has already sent letters regarding the expirations to each agency, and placed a hold on any new placements there.

Between 350 and 400 children are placed through the seven foster family agencies that failed to reapply (McKinley is the largest), but those homes can easily be recertified by another foster family agency, and placement disruptions are not expected. More concern exists over the approximately 300 children—200 from DCFS and 100 from Probation—living in the 32 group homes, some of them large, whose contracts are expiring. The number of beds for hard-to-place or developmentally disabled youngsters will shrink considerably; only five RCL 14 providers exist in Los Angeles County and two of them did not submit paperwork. DCFS staff plan to meet with each agency where children need transitions, including one for Regional Center clients and numerous six-bed homes with RCL levels from 6 through 14. Between 20 and 30 additional children are placed with out-of-county providers and will also be transitioned appropriately, Ms. Parrish said.

Commissioners requested details on each affected agency and the children placed there, expressing dismay at the situation, especially in light of protests two years ago from group home providers about diminished referrals. Word on the street, Commissioner Kleinberg said, is that agencies that were late with their submissions still want to serve, and that 800 children will have to change placements because DCFS is simply being rigid about paperwork. The children will be the ones to suffer, and the department is being seen as taking an anti-child stance. Commissioner Williams questioned the complexity of the RFSQ process, asking if every agency was organizationally sophisticated enough to track the many changes and addenda solely through e-mail and the Internet. Mr. Chan acknowledged that the process was not a simple one, and that it was started a year in advance to ensure that contractors could read and understand the documents, have their comments incorporated, and attend conferences where questions could be addressed in writing. Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton believes that the process was adhered to as documented and proper procedures were followed; it was not what was done, but how it was done and how it was communicated that brought about some problems. She encouraged the department to address not just the legal aspects of the process, but communication within the department and with stakeholders.

The Board of Supervisors expects DCFS to run an accountable process, Ms. Ploehn said, and the Auditor-Controller's Office is currently conducting an examination to determine if the rules were followed. Though she understands how it might seem like an easy decision to re-open the contracting process to those who missed the deadline, 161 agencies

did submit timely paperwork and would have every reason to object to that action. And if agencies aren't able to follow a process that is in their best financial interest, Commissioner Biondi wondered, what other DCFS directives might they be ignoring?

DCFS is working closely with Probation on the gap analysis, and Ms. Parrish promised to share that information with Commissioners. Vice Chair Worthy-Clayton confirmed that both Probation and the Department of Mental Health are participating in the process of placement transfers, and she encouraged the use of language that is inclusive of that collaboration.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**